Sore Winner?

February 1, 2003 By Anita Flanagan

File this under “No Biggie for HIVers but Potential Badda-boom for their Sex Partners”: Researchers at GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) grabbed front-page headlines last November when they announced they were desperately seeking Susans to test a vaccine against genital herpes (HSV-2), a bug that has bitten some 50 million Americans (and counting, at the rate of a million a year). It’s no news for HIVers because the vast majority already have herpes, but it could mean a lot for their sweeties who are HIV and HSV negative. Why? Because herpes is easily spread -- even absent open sores, and, alas, even if you use a condom (the glove may not cover all affected areas). Plus, it facilitates transmission of HIV.

Vax-maker GSK announced it was launching the trial after a University of Texas study of 2,700 HSV neggies showed that the formula had fought off infection in three-quarters of the women. Sad to report, it fared poorly in gals already infected with the related HSV-1; even more strange, it was a total flop in guys. GSK will recruit about 7,550 women for sites nationwide. If results resemble those in the Texas study, the vax could hit the market in about five years -- a mere blip on the vax-research timeline. For info on how to sign up, visit www.niaid.nih.gov/dmid/stds/herpevac. Last but not least, whether the vax will have a therapeutic benefit for HSV positives remains to be seen.

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